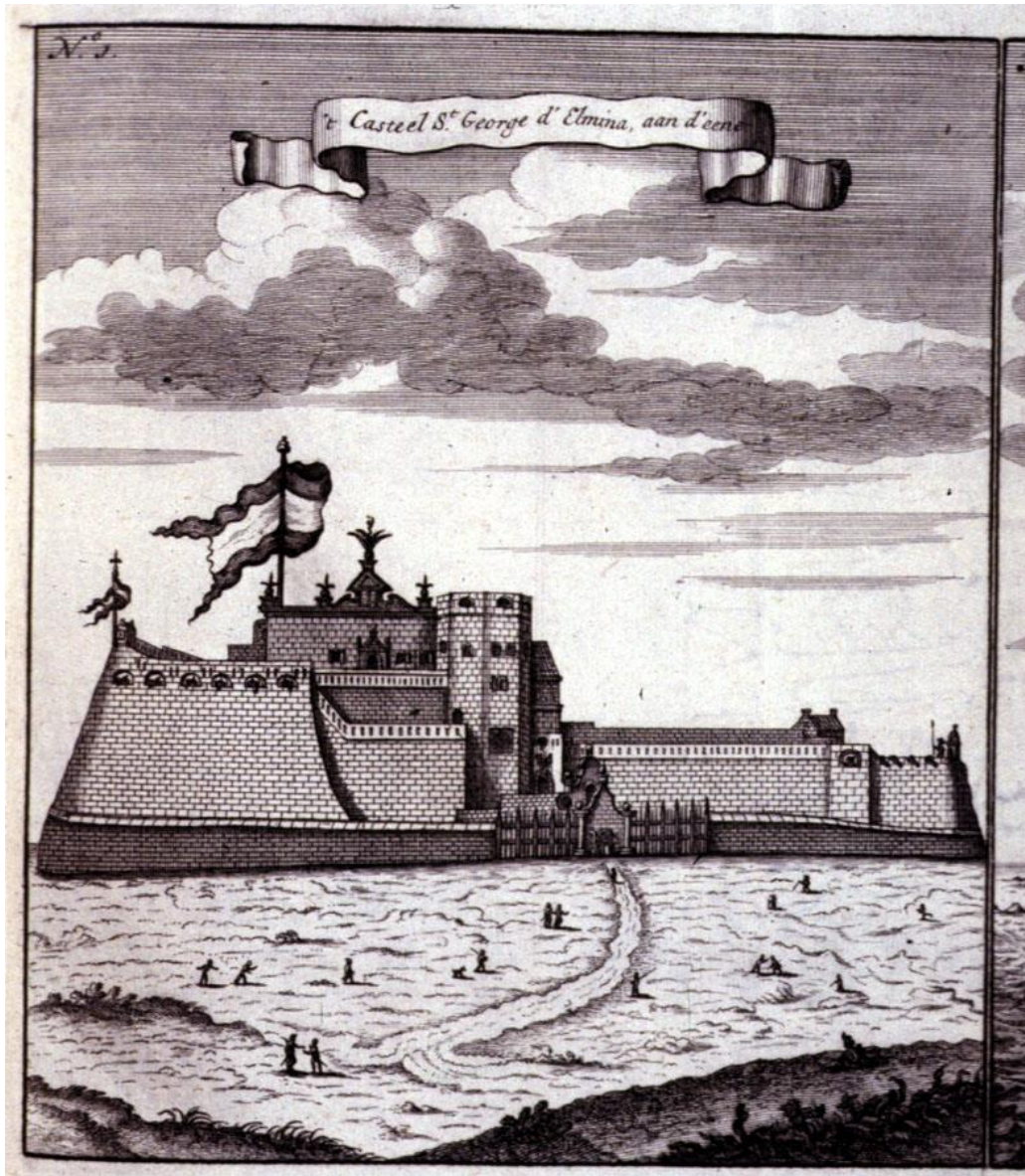


WEST AFRICAN SLAVE FORTS

By the seventeenth century, most trade in West Africa concentrated on the sale of slaves. São Jorge da Mina played a significant part in the Atlantic Slave Trade. The castle acted as a depot where slaves were bought in bartering fashion from local African chiefs and kings. The slaves, often captured in the African interior by the slave-catchers of coastal tribes, were sold to Portuguese traders in exchange for goods such as textiles and horses. The slaves were held captive in the castle before exiting through the castle's infamous "Door of No Return" to be transported and resold in newly colonized Brazil and other Portuguese colonies.



CONSIDER: What was the purpose of the slave fort?
 Why were the docks called the "door of no return?"
 Describe the appearance of the fort.

WEST AFRICAN SLAVE FORTS

This bustling trade port holds an enormous slave castle, or fort, that was typically built by European powers as a depot for the exchange of gold, ivory, and captured Africans. Within these castles a luxury apartment served as the living quarters for trade commanders and a large warehouse held human captives waiting for sale. Slave castles were often painted white and built on prominent bluffs in picturesque coves along the coast. They operated as miniature cities and were usually armed with guns, soldiers, and a military and trade commander. Captive Africans in the slave pen continue to be inspected for sale while the already chosen ones wait to be shipped in a canoe to the anchored schooner. The white tents along the beach might serve as shelter for the ship's crew for a few days while in port.

The trans-Atlantic slave trade was the largest movement of people in history. Between 10 and 15 million Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic between 1500 and 1900. But this figure grossly understates the actual number of Africans enslaved, killed, or displaced as a result of the slave trade. At least 2 million Africans--10 to 15 percent--died during the infamous "Middle Passage" across the Atlantic. Another 15 to 30 percent died during the march to or confinement along the coast. Altogether, for every 100 slaves who reached the New World, another 40 had died in Africa or during the Middle Passage.

CONSIDER: How many Africans were involved in the slave trade?

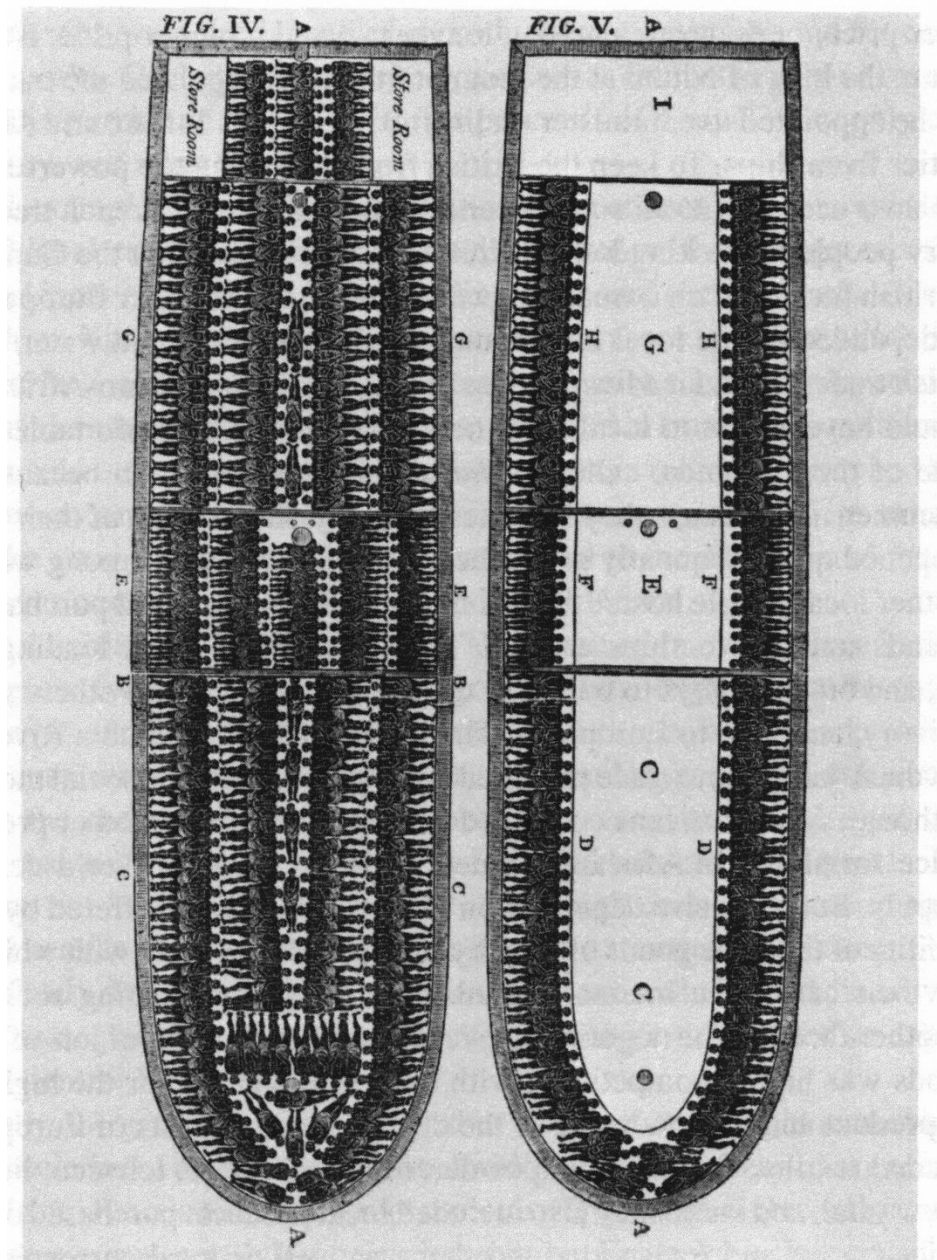
Why are many slave trade statistics deceiving?

What do the casualties tell us about the conditions of this industry?

MIDDLE PASSAGE

Slaves who were herded into the slave ships, into the dark, landed on unsanded plank floors, chained to their neighbors, their right foot shackled to the left foot of the person to their right. Their left foot shackled to the right foot of the person to their left. About 18 inches or less below, another layer of slaves on another unsanded, plank floor.

Every time the waves came you could see them and prepare for them, you just slid across these unsanded floors. There was no fresh air, no light. The slaves had no way of knowing where they were going [or] when, if ever, they would get there. And indeed it was a long trip. At best, if the weather was good, it was a six weeks' journey. And then they were unloaded among these strange pale-skinned people with bright colored eyes who hollered things at them. And if they didn't understand it, they hollered louder.



CONSIDER: What do the figures tell us about the treatment of slaves?

What did slavers do to the slaves in order to make bigger profits?

Imagine yourself in this situation

MIDDLE PASSAGE

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1h280.html>

Heading for Jamaica in 1781, the ship Zong was nearing the end of its voyage. It had been twelve weeks since it had sailed from the West African coast with its cargo of 417 slaves. Water was running out. Then, compounding the problem, there was an outbreak of disease. The ship's captain, reasoning that the slaves were going to die anyway, made a decision. In order to reduce the owner's losses he would throw overboard the slaves thought to be too sick to recover. The voyage was insured, but the insurance would not pay for sick slaves or even those killed by illness. However, it would cover slaves lost through drowning.

The captain gave the order; 54 Africans were chained together, then thrown overboard. Another 78 were drowned over the next two days. By the time the ship had reached the Caribbean, 132 persons had been murdered

CONSIDER: What were some of the problems that arose during the voyage?

How did the captain deal with the problems?

Imagine yourself in this situation

SLAVE AUCTIONS

Olaudah Equiano, *The Life of Olaudah Equiano the African* (1789)

We were not many days in the merchant's custody, before we were sold after their usual manner, which is this: On a signal given, (as the beat of a drum) the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamor with which this is attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers, serve not a little to increase the apprehension of terrified Africans, who may well be supposed to consider them as the ministers of that destruction to which they think themselves devoted.

In this manner, without scruple, are relations and friends separated, most of them never to see each other again. I remember, in the vessel in which I was brought over, in the men's apartment, there were several brothers, who, in the sale, were sold in different lots; and it was very moving on this occasion, to see and hear their cries at parting. Is it not enough that we are torn from our country and friends, to toil for your luxury and lust of gain? Must every tender feeling be likewise sacrificed to your avarice? Are the dearest friends and relations, now rendered more dear by their separation from their kindred, still to be parted from each other, and thus prevented from cheering the gloom of slavery, with the small comfort of being together; and mingling their sufferings and sorrows? Why are parents to lose their children, brothers their sisters, husbands their wives? Surely, this is a new refinement in cruelty, which, while it has no advantage to atone for it, thus aggravates distress; and adds fresh horrors even to the wretchedness of slavery.

CONSIDER: What is happening?

Is this good or bad? Why?

What makes this good/bad? Explain

SLAVE AUCTIONS

"Sold! to the highest bidder"

The slaves would be brought from the pen, in turn, to stand on a raised platform so that they could be seen by the buyers. Before the bidding began, those that wished to, could come up onto the platform to inspect the slaves closely. The slaves had to endure being poked, prodded and forced to open their mouths for the buyers.

The auctioneer would decide a price to start the bidding. This would be higher for fit, young slaves and lower for older, very young or sickly slaves. Potential buyers would then bid against each other. The person who bid the most would then own that slave. The picture below shows a slave being auctioned to the highest bidder.

The 'Grab and Go' Auction

All people who wanted to buy a slave on the day of the auction would pay the trader an agreed amount of money. The trader would then give them a ticket for each slave that they had bought. At the sound of a drum roll, the door to the slave pen would be opened and the buyers would rush in and grab the slave or slaves that they wanted. The buyers then checked their slaves out by returning their ticket or tickets to the slave trader.

CONSIDER: How were the slaves treated?

What makes this such a terrible scene?

What adjectives would you use to describe this?